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ABSTRACT

There is currently much interest in the assessment of student achievement in public schools. This guide to forms of assessment discusses some of the most common tests and their uses. Standardized tests are described, and some of their limitations are outlined. State-mandated tests are common, and, because the creators of such tests are removed from the classroom situation, these tests may have little relation to what is actually taught. The use of portfolios provides a way that is aligned with the constructivist approach to learning to measure student achievement on a day-to-day basis. Rubrics may be developed to assess each product in the portfolio, making the interpretation of portfolio contents easier. Portfolio results cannot be reduced to a number, however, nor can they be machine scored, making this form of assessment more difficult to use in communicating student achievement results. (SLD)

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Assessment: A Teacher's Guide

Marlow Ediger

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1

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ASSESSMENT – A TEACHER'S GUIDE

Much is being written about assessment of student achievement in public schools. The purpose given here, pertains to conveying information of student achievement to the lay public. Testing has been a salient way stressed to know how well students are doing in academic achievement. There are several kinds of tests which will be discussed to assist teachers to differentiate among these tests.

Standardized Testing

Standardized tests have the following characteristics:

1. They are published by commercial companies who have moneys for doing pilot studies.
2. They are based on norms from pilot studies. These norms then are used to make comparison with students who have presently taken the test.
3. The norms are built upon the guideline that a test item is positive if it was answered correctly by those high on the total test. Conversely, a test item is negative if a person low on the total test answers the individual test items correctly.
4. A spread of test scores from the pilot study is a result from the 99th down to the first percentile. This is a built-in device to spread students out from high to low. Standardized tests have a philosophy of their tests are developed to show this spread. This appears to separate "the sheep from the goats," a Biblical statement.
5. Multiple choice test items are inherent in standardized tests. Students then respond to these test items, not show creative responses.
6. These tests are not valid in terms of content/skills taught in a local classroom. The test was developed by those external and removed from the individual student's classroom.
7. Specific academic disciplines may not have content to be measured in a standardized test. Thus, a minimal number of test items may pertain to science/social studies in these tests.
8. Standardized tests are weak in student creations such as writing and speaking. Rather, the test writers determine which test items in multiple choice form for students to answer.

9. Each multiple choice item is to be unrelated to the others. Why? Clues are not to be given to test takers when answering sequential test items.

10. A numeral provides data on student achievement for the total test results, such as a percentile. Subtest results may also be given in a percentile.

State Mandated Tests

As the name indicates, these tests are developed on the state level. The writers also are removed in time and place from the local classroom. State mandated tests emphasize the following:

1. They generally have accompanying objectives for the classroom teacher to use in teaching students. Thus, validity of the tests can be high if aligned with the objectives.

2. The quality of multiple choice items on the test may be lower than standardized tests due to not trying these out in pilot studies.

3. Both validity and reliability data are lacking due, largely, to a lack of pilot studies.

4. These tests may also be known as high stakes testing if the results from students are used to determine who graduate from high school or who is promoted from one grade level to the next.

5. They are also a part of the standards setting movement in a state. High standards, along with high expectations for learners to achieve are in emphasis.

6. Test results can be machine scored in mass numbers, as is true of standardized tests.

7. Report cards from student test results may be averaged to compare one school district with the next. These comparisons are then made public. Standardized test results, if given on the state level, may also be contrasted, district by district, in report card form.

8. Poorly performing schools, from test results, may eventually be taken over by the state in governance and curriculum supervision. This may be true regardless of the socio-economic levels of participating schools or school districts.

9. The charter school movement, within a public school district, offers unique solutions for low achieving schools. They, if approved by the state, would not be tied to the red tape which the public schools are required to embrace. How satisfactory charter schools are has not been determined, other than through opinions.

10. State mandated standards and tests are arbitrarily determined as to the complexity level of inherent

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standards for student achievement.

Portfolios and Constructionism

Portfolios have come into the educational literature to emphasize what teachers and students do on a day to day basis in the classroom. External writers of tests such as standardized and state mandated are minimized in their importance. Thus, the philosophy of constructivism has stressed the importance of the following every day classroom experiences to become a part of the individual student's portfolio:

1. Written work such as poems, stories, reports, outlines, summaries, and journal writing of the involved learners developing the portfolio.
2. Art products including murals, bulletin board displays, pencil sketching, water color work, as each relates to objectives of instruction.
3. Construction items such as making models and dioramas. Snapshots of each large item may be placed into a portfolio.
4. Cassette recordings of oral work including book reports, committee work, and peer instructions.
5. A video tape of seminars and cooperative learning involving the student preparing the portfolio.

Rubrics may be developed to assess each product in the portfolio. A five point Likert scale may be developed by raters of the students' portfolios. Each of the five levels needs to be clearly written so that the rubrics can be used to rate the diverse portfolios. Interscorer reliability is important. The following are additional considerations in rating each portfolio or sub part of it:

1. The numerical rating given may be quite subjective due to a lack of agreement by raters doing the rating.
2. Numerical ratings are not the major objective in portfolio assessment. The major objective is to view student processes and products. Here, one can notice achievement of the every day progress of the student, first hand.
3. Parents may observe what their offspring is achieving in school.
4. Portfolio development provides ample opportunities for the student to reflect and think about what has been learned and what is left to achieve.
5. Ownership of the portfolio resides within the student. Internal personnel, not external test writers, are involved in portfolio development. Assessment is ongoing and continuous.

Assessment has always been a major goal in teaching and learning. Presently, the testing and measurement movement is strong among state governors and legislators. However, there is not general agreement on how students should be assessed to notice achievement. Portfolio development has strong merit, but their results are difficult to communicate. These results cannot be reduced to a numeral, nor can they be machine scored.